2; Gervis T-3 (no date) 1954 AV1 Kashmir AV1
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making of a road; but despite all the difficulties it was completed. Much of the work and fighting undertaken in its making was described by Knight in his *Where Three Empires Meet*, a book which became a favourite prize for schoolboys in the Victorian age for no less than three Victoria Crosses were won in the expedition which he describes so vividly.

"On the completion of the road the large, ill-disciplined, ill-equipped garrison that was maintained at enormous expense by the Kashmir State, was supplanted by a small but extremely efficient force under British officers," he says and goes on, "Since then the tribesmen have been reduced to subjection, the Pax Britannica has been extended to the furtherest corners of the Gilgit Agency, and the influence of Britain far beyond."

It had culminated with the subjection of the Hunza-Nagars, tribes of raiders who had lived by pouncing on the caravans which passed from Kashgar and Yarkand, to be followed by a small expedition subduing the Chilas.

The country, like Ladakh and Baltistan, again covers about one hundred and fifty miles on each side of the great River Indus.

Even to this day, because of the heavy snowfalls and danger of avalanches, the road is closed to pack animals during the winter and spring months. Up to the Burzil or Kamri passes the country is well wooded and reasonably fertile with some glorious views from the tops of the passes, and on the way, especially at Gurais, some delightful camping grounds are to be found, among flowering meadows near firs and pines, with fishing and a fair chance of bagging a red bear. Until long after the British garrison was established there no European ladies were permitted to go beyond these two passes, not even when accompanied by their husbands. Over the 13,500 feet high Burzil pass and the road to Astor, the country is immediately arid and bare, with high, precipitous mountains, again a sportsman's country with magnificent markhor and fine ibex. Most of the marches are now over rough rock wastes which, during the summer months, radiate the terrible heat of the sun; there is no wonderful scenery to relieve the landscape; you find yourself thinking back to stories of the "beggar" mollas who would have trodden this road with heads down,

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troops and the advice of His Highness's local authorities.

The occupation of the Gilgit district had never paid. The Dogras had suffered heavy loss in it again and again, but the honour of the Kashmir Durbar (the title usually applied to the government of a native state), would not for a moment permit of withdrawal. Moreover, withdrawal would not have answered the purpose of securing peace; it would merely have opened, by uncovering the right bank of the Indus, a road constantly used in former days for raiding into Baltistan or Little Thibet, the next province on the north-east belonging to Kashmir. The remedy would have been worse than the disease; a State which begins retiring is in the East the natural and lawful prey of its adventurous neighbours. I found no question of withdrawal being discussed; the attention of the Durbar was entirely turned to securing its position on the frontier, and to retaking the Fort of Chaprot. Throughout the winter nothing could be done, the passes leading to Gilgit were closed by snow, but with the return of spring every nerve had been strained to accomplish this object.

The Durbar was immensely proud of its army, which at this time was very numerous and costly. It was quite ignorant of the fact that the army was without the very rudiments of organisation, that it was merely an unwieldy agglomeration of units, and that its leaders, men for the most part of good family and of fighting instincts, were one and all as innocent as the babe unborn of the art of war. Trusting to the numbers of their troops and to the

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well-known gallantry of the Dogra race, the rulers in Kashmir seemed determined to restore order on the frontier, and to wipe out the disgrace which had been inflicted on their arms.

Ignoring the enormous natural difficulties of the country, the villainous state of the existing tracks —roads there were practically none, when once the valley of Kashmir was left—and the conditions under which an expedition on its frontier must be carried on, the Durbar all through the spring and summer of 1888 poured thousands of men towards Gilgit. The army was without a trained general, had no staff, no proper transport, commissariat, medical, or ordnance departments, and was in short a mass of armed men without the semblance of organisation. The operations at Gilgit against the Hunza-Nagar tribesmen were to be directed by a committee of generals and sirdars, assisted by the Governor of Gilgit. Such an arrangement would elsewhere have been recognised as ensuring the failure of any military operations. As a matter of fact there was in the end no fighting, which was a mercy, considering the condition of the Kashmir army. The Durbar built a golden bridge for its revolted vassals, peace on the frontier was temporarily patched up, and the Kashmir troops, with the exception of the usual garrison, were withdrawn from Gilgit by the autumn.

After paying a farewell visit to the Maharaja, we started in one of His Highness's house-boats for Bandipur, the place on the Woollar Lake from which the road to Gilgit starts. The distance between Bandipur and Gilgit is about a hundred and ninety miles

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this rather ungrateful at the time, till I found that, with the Governor's connivance, Wazir Ghulam Haidar had previously seized his best house and lands. It was double-dealing of this kind which had brought on the troubles for the Durbar, a mixture of weakness and bullying, fear and swagger, which had half-frightened and half-exasperated the tribesmen into attack. There was also a Helen in the case.

A fortnight at Gilgit put me in full possession of the leading facts bearing on the existing difficulties, which may be summarised as follows:—Hunza was extremely difficult of attack, and practically could have but little pressure brought to bear on it, having exits to the north on to the Pamirs. It could get all its luxuries from Kashgar and Yarkand, and had some connection with China; an Amban being at the time I was in Gilgit, or shortly before, in Hunza, to enquire as to the cause of the trouble. He was plundered and practically sent naked away, but that is another story. Nagar being a *cul-de-sac*, and depending for its salt and other luxuries on Gilgit, could be squeezed, and was, moreover, supposed to be easier of access. The Durbar, while jealous of its military reputation, and ostensibly making great preparations for war, really wished to avoid fighting, and was anxious to arrive at peace by any means in its power. The Committee at Gilgit fully recognised the difficulties of supply and carriage, and were also most anxious to come to some *modus vivendi*. The Hunza-Nagar people were sick of the game, and wanted to make peace, so that the men might look after the crops instead of spending the

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best part of their time sitting like vultures on the tops of cliffs on the look-out for the Kashmir army of invasion. With things in this condition, and nothing much more to be learnt, there was no use in my staying longer, and I welcomed the invitation I now received from the Mehtar of Chitral, and prepared to start for that country.

And here, perhaps, will be a fitting place to point out more clearly the importance of Gilgit. It is a poor valley, separated from India by snow passes, situated on the far side of the Indus at the extreme verge of Kashmir territory. Why, it has been asked, should it be worth our while to interfere there whatever happened? The answer is, of course, Russia. She had advanced practically to the Hindu-Kush; it was necessary to see that she did not cross it. No man in his senses ever believed that a Russian army would cross the Pamirs and attack India by the passes of Hunza and Chitral, but we could not overlook the fact that in 1885, when war hung in the balance, some thousands of her troops were moved down towards the Pamirs. What was this for?—hardly for change of air or to shoot big game, as the British public were asked to believe later, when similar moves were made. The object was to get a footing on the south side of the Hindu-Kush, and to paralyse numbers of our troops who would have to be kept in observation of possible Russian lines of advance. Further, I have no hesitation in saying, and I know every inch of the country, and every important man in it, that at the time of which I am now writing, had war broken out between us and Russia, there was absolutely nothing

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had come up the autumn before made up into regiments it is true, but they had received no instruction in the use of their arms, and were useless from the military point of view when they arrived. Willing as they were, they had to be licked into shape, and taught everything from the beginning. It was out of the question to use them for road-making. I had therefore nothing but my company of sappers, and for ten months they worked on the roads practically every day, except on Sundays. It was hard on the men, for road work is very severe, but it was absolutely necessary, and I did my best by giving them extra food and pay to make it easy for them. The result was excellent; before the passes opened we had made the road to Nomal, opened a mule road between Gilgit and Bunji, a distance of thirty miles, and run a track practicable for laden animals up most of the six thousand feet of the dreadful Hattu Pir Mountain, besides improving some bridges on the road to Astor. Luckily much of the thirty miles between Gilgit and Bunji was open ground, but there were many miles of bad going, and to open a mule track through this was a triumph for my men, vile as I must admit the road was to the uninitiated. All this work kept me pretty busy, and I was in the saddle almost every day, riding backwards and forwards to inspect the work.

With the spring of 1891 from all directions came renewed rumours of trouble. The Indus valley tribes, and indeed most of my neighbours, habitually spent the winter, when there was no agricultural work to do, in discussing the advantages and disadvantages of resuming their raids on Kashmir

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territory, or of attacking each other, and in weaving plots. Embassies passed from republic to republic, and from ruler to ruler, suggesting combinations and general risings. It was the custom of the country, and as a rule it meant but little, but this year, as the scraps of information from all sides reached me, and were collated and pondered over, it seemed to me that all tended to show that real mischief was brewing. The threads I held in my hands persistently wove themselves into one pattern, and that pattern meant war.

However, it was no business of mine to meet my troubles half way, and we went about our work as usual. Thinking it would do the troops good, I moved in April with a couple of guns and some infantry to Gakuch in Punyal, forty miles from Gilgit. The road I have described before; it was an education to the officers and men of the mule battery, and also taught the infantry much that was useful. The marches, short as they were, were very severe. The Governor of Gilgit and the Kashmiri General accompanied the party, of which I was very glad. We, of course, never left the troops, and saw them over the difficult pieces. I gave the men meat rations occasionally, and we saw to their comfort ourselves. This may seem not worth mentioning, but it was a revelation to the Kashmiri officers. Most of the regimental officers and the men were already with us, grateful for the increased comfort of their quarters, for the punctual issue of pay, and for the good quality of their rations, but one and all were unaccustomed to being cared for on the march by their superiors, and appreciated

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B 661 time that Uzr Khan was desperately jealous of the boy, who was his father's favourite, and very popular with the people, that he hated his brother with added bitterness for his popularity with us, and that in his ignorant and suspicious mind lurked the fear that on the old chief's death we should support his young brother, should he attempt to gain possession of the little kingdom. Yet I had been obliged to advise the boy to act as his father wished, and this was the result.

K 712 The murder did not affect the position on the frontier, but the news which came at the same time that I heard of it did so very seriously. Twelve miles beyond Nomal lay Chalt, a small fort held by Kashmir troops under an agreement with the Nagar Chief. Close to it lay Chaprot, in which also there was a detachment of Kashmir troops.

B 662 721 Uzr Khan was now collecting his forces, and preparing to attack both Chalt and Chaprot. He would have moved the moment the murder was committed, but that he was not quite sure of what his father would do, and that he was in correspondence with the Hunza Chief and not in complete accord with him. Two young nephews of his were in Hunza, and he had sent to the Thum and asked that they might also be killed. The Hunza Chief had declined; he was apparently of opinion that they might be useful later in case of trouble with Nagar, being nearer in succession than Uzr Khan, and, moreover, they were his sister's boys. So he declined with indignation, and relations for a few days were strained between the two scoundrels.

5 691 721 There was not much time to think; moreover, I naturally had in mental pigeon-holes plans to

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meet emergencies, and I decided at once to make a dash for Chalt. I thanked my stars for Major Gokul and his sappers, and for our new road to Nomal. I gave the order at three in the afternoon, and by dusk two hundred men of the Kashmir Body Guard regiment, little Gurkhas and Dogras, were over the rope bridge and on their way, with their full complement of ammunition and rations. It could not be done quicker, for not more than half a dozen men at most could be on the bridge at one time. 648 721

To cross the guns was a more difficult matter. The Gilgit river was in full flood, a hundred and fifty yards wide, and running like a mill race. The mules we swam over, their kit and ammunition crossed by the rope-bridge, but we had to make a raft and cross the guns on that. It was ticklish work, but by two in the morning the detachment of two guns was safely over.

There were other things to think of, and selecting a couple of men I could trust I started them off as hard as they could go to Chalt, with orders to cut the rope bridges over the Hunza river and over a stream which ran into it just above Chalt from the Hunza side. If they succeeded in doing this before Uzr Khan moved I knew that I should forestall him, for I calculated that he would not dare to cross on rafts even if he could, and that it would take several days to repair the bridges. At the same time I sent an express to Raja Akbar Khan of Punyal, calling on him to turn out his merry men, and to move across the hills and join me at Nomal. We had organised a couple of hundred Punyali levies, who on this and subsequent occasions did

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yeoman's service. The moment I decided to move I also sent off a handful of local levies to seize the Chaichar Parri, a terrible cliff position on the Gilgit side of Chalt, the possession of which was rightly held by the Hunza-Nagar people, and by the inhabitants of the neighbouring states, to be of the utmost value. Once this was in our hands our march to Chalt could not be disputed, though a column might be harassed by fire from the left bank of the Hunza river. Knowing the nature of the road between Nomal and Chalt I sent an urgent order to Major Gokul to leave all standing on the Hattu Pir, on which he was at work, and to bring his sappers up by forced marches. Finally, having set everything going, I reported by letter my proceedings to the Resident in Kashmir, and started after the troops.

This was one of the numerous occasions on which the absence of a telegraph line was a godsend. A man must be able to take responsibility on the frontier, and so long as he honestly sticks to the spirit of his general instructions, it is much better that he should have a fairly free hand.

A couple of hours' canter in the early morning carried me to Nomal, where I found my little army in high feather, and full of fight. I had left the Governor of Gilgit wringing his hands and prophesying disasters, but the General girded on his sword and came cheerfully along, confident in my star. At Nomal I heard that the Chaichar Parri was in my hands, and in the afternoon we pushed on another six miles before halting for the night. The last part of the road had been so bad that I could not

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bring on the guns, but I turned out every available man of the Nomal garrison and set them to work to improve it, and arranged for the guns to be brought on later. Early next morning we pushed on, being caught up half-way by Raja Akbar Khán and the Punyali levies under their chiefs, mostly the Raja's cousins and brothers, and after a severe march reached Chalt in the afternoon. I found that my men had cut the bridge, and that my arrival was totally unexpected. I made the best dispositions feasible for my little force, and sat down to wait events. An attack was threatened the first and second nights, but it did not come off. I heard afterwards that my move had come as a complete surprise on Uzr Khan, who was collecting his forces at Nilt, eight miles off.

The next few days were a little anxious, but each day that passed without my being attacked made for peace. Uzr Khan wanted war, but feared to make it, and his old father and the more sensible men of the country were against fighting. Every hour's delay saw us strengthened, and the chances of an attack on Chalt by the Nagar forces being crowned with success rapidly diminished. The guns got through on the third day after my arrival, though getting over the Chaichar Parri was difficult work. The mules had to be swum across the river below the great cliff, and recrossed again above it, a reach of fairly smooth water making this possible. It was dangerous work at the best, and some of the men had narrow escapes of being carried down the river and drowned. The arrival of the guns strengthened my position very much, and I awaited events with equanimity,

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utilising every moment to improve the road behind me. When we marched up there were eight places where mules had to be unladen in as many miles, on our return, three weeks later, there was a practicable mule road open right through from Chalt to Gilgit, a distance of thirty miles.

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After ten days or so of *pourparlers* the Hunza-Nagar envoys came to my camp in a suitable frame of mind, and we discussed the situation. Both states were for the moment honestly anxious to avoid war. Uzr Khan's contemplated coup had completely failed, and the boot was on the other leg very completely. The fort of Chalt, though contemptible from the military point of view, was now three times as strong as we had found it; it was garrisoned by picked Kashmir troops amply provisioned, and last, but not least, we had driven a road through the Chaichar Parri. I had been told that any attempt to make a road, or to strengthen the fort, would inevitably lead to war, that the tribes looked on Chalt "as on the strings of their wives' paijamas," and by a timely move I had prevented war, strengthened the hold of Kashmir on its frontier posts, and made it easy to reach them. The first and most important step towards curbing the tribesmen and barring the road to their raids had been taken, and without firing a shot.

Having come to an understanding with the envoys, and given them some advice which I much doubted their taking, and a plain warning that any attempt to occupy the Kashmir frontier posts, or to hold the road between them and Nomal, would be taken as an "unfriendly act,"

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000 officers working behind him, piled the landing stages with mounds of grain and munitions of war. But even his ceaseless activity could not have conquered the difficulty of crossing convoys over the Indus in barges that had to be rowed, and of landing the stores in Gilgit in time. The establishment of the wire-rope ferry over the great river solved the question. A good Royal Engineer officer on the frontier is worth his weight in gold, and Aylmer was one of the best. He was invaluable; without him my force would have been paralysed.

By the middle of November all was ready. The necessary troops were collected at Gilgit, and I had a month's supply in hand, and more coming in daily. It was a month later than the Government had meant me to move, but that was not my fault. The position was not without elements of risk. To the south the Indus valley tribes, as usual on the approach of winter, were discussing the advisability of forming a strong coalition, and of attacking Bunji.

•721 If we failed in Hunza, I knew that the attack would come off. I had, therefore, to leave one Kashmir regiment at Bunji, and on the road near it, guarding the line of communication with Astor, where my grain reserves were, and holding the posts at bridges and ferries. Chitral was uneasy, and my friend Prince Hal, from his headquarters in Yasin, was in communication with the Indus valley tribes, and was ready for a dash at Gilgit in case we came to grief.

No one on the frontier believed in the possibility of a peaceful settlement of our differences with Hunza and Nagar. These states were arming. Confident

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in the strength of their defiles, and of their power to seize Chalt, and to defeat Kashmir troops as of yore, they meditated seizing the Chaichar Parri, and possibly besieging Nomal. A spy of theirs had been captured near Nomal, and gave valuable information as to the intended move. The tribesmen were collecting for a dash, and the time was come to advance. The detachment of the 5th Gurkhas, reduced by losses from frost bite to a little over a hundred and eighty men, and the two guns of the Hazara mountain battery were accordingly moved to Chalt, and the improvement of the road behind them was undertaken. Mr Spedding, the head of the firm of contractors which was making the road from Gilgit to Kashmir, had placed his European staff and a body of picked Pathan labourers at my disposal, and they did splendid work on the road, and subsequently advanced with the force as far as Nilt.

A few days before I started the remainder of my force to the front George Robertson rejoined me from Kafiristan. We had much to talk over. Having a presentiment that I should not see the little campaign through, and feeling that the next senior officer, from his ignorance of the people and country, would not be in a position to deal with the chiefs when opposition was over, I wrote an order appointing Robertson chief political officer to the force, in the event of the command passing out of my hands. I had reason later to congratulate myself on having done so.

By the end of November my troops were concentrated at Chalt, and I moved there myself. I had for some time been in constant